OPINION

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OPINION

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CONTENTS

"Honesty ? Bah, Just Simple Folly !"	3	
The Problem of Corruption	5	Vivek
Medea	6	K. N. Daruwalla
Indo-Soviet Treaty and Bangla Desh	9	A. G. Noorani
A Man is a Season ; Herons	15	Kamala Das
Muslim Women on the Move	17	A. B. Shah
The Takeover ; Mother Goddess	21	Rosemary Pinto
Problem Poet	22	Eunice de Souza
Indo-Pak-Bangla Desh Confederation	23	Hussain Shaheen
This Business	27	R. Parthasarthy
The Night that Maia Was Lost	28	Bhikshu K. and Abbess Snehlata

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"HONESTY? BAH, JUST SIMPLE FOLLY!"

A GREAT scholar and teacher, noted equally for his profound knowledge and his penetrating mind, said to this writer one evening in the early years after independence, "I am very glad you have laid so much stress on honesty in your report on administration. That is going to be the Achilles' heel of your country. You know I'm no mere theorist, I've had a great deal to do with practical affairs in many parts of the world, and the one danger I see for India is just this, plain simple dishonesty bedevilling everything. If you don't keep it severely in check, I should not be surprised if at the end of twenty years, you find your progress minimal, your place somewhere near the bottom of the list of developing countries. You see, you have tremendous physical handicaps, your population, your poverty, your lack of homogenity, your size, your easy-going temperament, your relaxing climate, in comparison even with countries like Malaysia or Indonesia, and if you in addition lack the sovereign virtue of honesty in the management of your affairs your future cannot but be dark." How true these words have turned out to be can be seen from the following: "Our per capita income for 1969 of $93 (Rs. 675) at current prices was much less than half of the average of $218 for the developing countries as a whole. The figures compiled by the World Bank reveal that India was placed twenty-second among twenty-seven developing countries. We were ahead of only Pakistan, Burma, Nigeria, Malawi and the Congo."

Now of course, many factors contributed to this debacle, but that behind them all, stood the basic fact of dishonesty, there can be no doubt. To fourteen guests separately, ten Indians, four foreigners working in India, reasonably intelligent and observant people in various walks of life, a hostess put, in an association of ideas game, the word Delhi. From ten the immediate response was 'corruption', from two 'sink of iniquity'. Of the remaining two, one sighed sadly and said 'If there were even some decent Ministers' and when pressed for a word, took refuge in 'The Wasteland', and the other, an academician, remarked he would sum up Delhi thus, 'Sab chalta hai, no holds barred'. This is the reputaton of those who matter in our capital, this the esteem in which they are held! And that there is good reason for such views, who can question? Corruption, dishonesty in the management of affairs, public and private, is generally like an iceberg. The most that comes in sight is about a tenth, nine-tenths is hidden well below the surface, and you must conjecture it from the tenth that is visible. Even on this basis more than enough is apparent to convince anyone of its very wide spread throughout the country.

In the first years after independence, upto the middle fifties perhaps, people felt uneasy about dishonesty in public affairs and corruption generally. Their consciences used to be disturbed. Persistent questioning in the legislatures and elsewhere was common. Bad, stop it, was often the general reaction. Authority used to be made uncomfortable and put on its defence. Gradually this changed. Less and less notice began to be taken as the people became more and more accustomed to such unethical behaviour. Today it is almost the way of life and few indeed are sufficiently troubled by it even to condemn it. In all its many ramifications, bribe-taking, nepotism, influence-peddling, black money, smuggling, etc.,

etc., it flourises like the green bay tree, the lush vigour of its leaves being often the subject of not adverse, but admiring, comment. "Smart fellow, he's done very well," people will tell you about a Minister who they say under various names has got hold of four luxury flats without paying for one, or has built cinemas and hotels, again under various relatives' names in quite a number of places without digging into his own bank account. "If he doesn't look after himself and his people now when he is in a position to do so, when will he ?" is another defence sometimes put forward in condonation of gross misconduct.

How has all this come about ? The conduct of the great is as the breeze, says Confucius, that of those below them as the grass that assuredly bends in the direction the breeze takes. Those in supreme authority having become intensely corrupt, the disease, endemic at most in the past, has assumed epidemic form and proportions. Nehru, his admirers insist, was not corrupt. Maybe, but even they cannot maintain that he did not, time and again, condone corrupt and dishonest conduct. His face was not stern against it, but rather soft and smiling towards it. In the result, by condoning it, he commanded it. In effect to his favourites, he said "Behave as unethically as you like, I'll look after you." A man of great charisma, of tremendous influence over his countrymen, Prime Minister for seventeen years, with this approach is it any wonder conditions throughout the country deteriorated speedily ? If it didn't matter a whit to the Prime Minister, why should the Chief Minister not make hay while the sun shone ? And so all down the line, official and unofficial. "Do as you like" says the Spanish proverb "and pay for it". Nehru made it read "Do as you like and I'll see you don't pay for it." Whether he ever chose a motto is not known, but the most appropriate one for him was, of course, "Cover up, cover up, cover up all the time."

After Nehru came Lal Bahadur Shastri and for just a while it seemed as if the trend might be reversed. Shastri was an honest man, and the Government and country had just begun to feel the effect of that honesty, when, alas, the weight of our sins tilted Fate's balance against us and he was taken. Followed the present Prime Minister, brought up in Nehru's household and habituated to its atmosphere. In the result, an even greater deterioration than before. Going a step further than her father, she doesn't merely condone unethical conduct ; she practices it herself to great effect. The Presidential Election, the Small Car Business, the Chabbra incident, are just a few instances. Moreover, to a convenient forgetting of ethical standards, she joins ruthlessness reminiscent of her ardent friends, the Communists. The combination has been having an irresistable effect on the country. There is more dishonest and anti-social behaviour in places, high and low, today, it would seem, than there ever was in the past. The personal integrity of the ruler, they key to good government according to the ancients, has reached a new low, and has brought to the same level as itself the other factor in good government, the moral sense of the citizenry. "Garibi hatao" is the slogan under which the Prime Minister displays her skills, but what is being hataoed is honesty, decency, ethical conduct, liberty, not garibi. Under such auspices that is bound to stay

as the past has shown.

Spare a little time to think of this, citizens, on Republic Day and on the days that follow. Not in trickery, deceit and dishonesty, however successful in the short run, lies your future. If there is no honesty in your government and you, there is no health in either. Though you both shout a million slogans a million times each, you will not attain good government or good living. For that, there must be personal integrity in the rulers you choose, moral sense in yourself. To these aspects the New Congress Manifesto attaches little importance. Yet these are the really important issues of this time. Consider your candidates in the light of these, not of what new Communist entrants to the Congress attempt to present to you as startling truths.

THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION

VIVEK

3 Dec. 1952

THE subject of the maintenance of integrity and the discouragement of corruption, including patronage and influence, was dealt with in a Report on Public Administration submitted to Government twenty months ago. The Report suggested a number of specific remedies. No action would seem to have been taken on the Report.

As one member of Parliament, who spoke in the debate pointed out, the increase in corruption is due very largely to those who exercise the highest authority in government. 'Before the war,' said Mr. Das, 'one never heard of I.C.S. officers doing anything to bring a blemish on the service, though there was corruption in the lower rungs of the ladder here and there. Now the highest officers and the people who rule the country above these are so much involved in this corruption that it becomes very necessary to have a resolution of this kind'.

Said the Report on Public Administration referred to above : 'It seems fairly clear that if the public are to have confidence that moral standards do prevail in high places, arrangements must be made that no one, however highly placed, is immune from inquiry if allegations against him are made by responsible parties and a *prima facie* case exists. . . . There must be a machinery for inquiry and it must exist within the framework of government and not, in the case of ministers, for example, within that of the political party. There should be no hushing up or appearance of hushing up for political and personal reasons.' The Report suggested that the best form of machinery would be a special tribunal appointed in each case to find out and establish facts. Such a tribunal could inquire into the conduct of a minister without making it impossible for him to continue to work during the pendency of the inquiry. On the receipt of the tribunal's report, government could decide whether further action, criminal or otherwise, should be taken.

Now, had the Government of India thought it worth while to carry out this suggestion shortly after it was made and had, by this time, tribunals inquired into specific allegations against one or two chief ministers,

shall we say, how great would have been the effect through out the country! Whatever the immediate inconvenience and loss of prestige to the political party of having some of its leaders investigated, the ultimate gain not only to the Government but to the political party itself from the establishment of the fact that a government belonging to the party did really desire a clean and honest administration, would have been enormous.

The Government's position regarding discouragement of corruption at the highest level would also have been greatly strengthened had orders been issued giving effect to another suggestion in the report namely, that ministers should avoid being under the obligation of large industrial and speculative interests. Unfortunately the practice of some has been to enjoy the hospitality as guests of such interests, to hold official conferences in their houses and to mainain the closest connexion with them. . . .

So long, it has been said, as there are fish in the water, so long will there be corruption among those concerned with government. The example of the totalitarian states shows that no amount of severity, not even the wholesale abrogation of the rule of law, has been able to suppress it. The duty of governments is not to condone it, to take all proper measures to fight it, and to discourage it by their own example. They can scarcely do these, if they are unable to take decisions on specific recommendations even after twenty months.

MEDEA

Before the sacrifice
knee-bending, oblations, worship
vermilion and sandal-paste
smeared on the horns
floral finesse
finger-drum going mad
and the uplifted khukri
and the ox-knees crumpling
as the ox-head rolls

So too the gifts
the tiara of inward-beating gold
the robe like a blanket of light

II

Even when her abandoned bed
hungered for Jason
nothing really happened
—they still were man and wife.
She sulked, she starved, she scowled
and wept in her inner sanctums
till flesh dripped away
and all that remained was passion
and barbaric sinew

It was when the corinthian princess
aspired to wifehood
superseding her in wedlock
that Medea invoked the gods
and more than the gods
the coils of serpent-hate
and the prowling, springing
shadow of Hecate
that slept foetus-like
in the dark core within her

Struggling still for office
she flung the robe
like a lariat on fire

III

There was a touch
of the acid-god about her
even her curse was scalding

She smouldered like a copper-plate
in an electric furnace
changing colour-patterns
—speckled ochre to fungus-blue
to ulcer-red
a tone for each succeeding hell
she burnt through
Meanwhile at the fateful moment
her rival Creusa
deflowered only a few moons ago
by Jason
..mirror-gazed
membraned with petroleum-jelly
subtle-hued as an oil-patch
devouring a larval-bed
She recognized herself
though already sweating
like resin-beaded pine.
But when she went up like a torch
and the minions gathered
as her screams rang across the vaulted roof
they didn't know
if she was an auto-wreck
or the daughter of Creon

Defining cataclysm is easy
She wore a robe of thousand dyes
gifted by Medea
and turned to pitch

K. N. Daruwalla

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THE INDO-SOVIET TREATY AND BANGLA DESA

A. G. NOORANI

TO very many, foreign affairs are, indeed, very foreign affairs. The subject is inherently complex and demands qualities of patience, detachment, application and a desire to *understand*. Few own them. This is by means peculiar to India. The late Mr. Dean Acheson wrote of "the cliches, the moralism, the emotionalism, the bad history, faulty analysis and just plain ignorance which suffocate most discussions of foreign affairs".

The intellectual failures are grave enough. But when they are compounded by moral ones, as well, it becomes well nigh impossible to have any serious debate on foreign policy. A false sense of patriotism can inspire the false notion of a conflict between loyalty to the truth and loyalty to the country, when the intellectual's best service to the country lies in his service to the truth. The worst form of debate is debate by innuendo. Prof. Morgenthau has well described this style as one "characterised by three organically connected qualities: the refusal to deal with an argument on its own merits, a cavalier attitude toward ascertainable facts, and the attempt to discredit by invective".

This style comes naturally enough to Communists and their fellow-travellers. Regretfully it has to be said that it is shared by some others as well. In recent months they, like the Communists, have done much to lower the tone of public debate on the issues which our policy on Bangla Desh raised, be it the issue of recognition or that of the Indo-Soviet Treaty. Imputations of disloyalty are all too freely made the moment one departs from received doctrine. A fair sample of this approach is provided by the attacks on the integrity of critics of the Treaty soon after the liberation of Bangla Desh. Since the Treaty has yet a life of 19 years and six months, it is important carefully to consider afresh, in the light of recent events, whether the critics were wrong, after all.

If one is inclined to score debating points one has merely to cite two official pronouncements to prove that the Treaty was not necessary to achieve the liberation of Bangla Desh. Mr. T. N. Kaul, the Foreign Secretary, said on August 8: "We have been working for this Treaty for over two years and it has nothing to do with the developments with Bangla Desh or the attitude of the U.S." And the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi said on January 3, at Bhuj, that it is wrong to say that India has achieved this success (liberation of Bangla Desh) because of the Indo-Soviet Treaty.

But let us consider the diplomatic record itself. It may be recalled that the joint statement issued on August 11, three days after the Treaty was signed, not only ruled out a "military solution" but demanded that "urgent steps be taken in East Pakistan" to enable the return of refugees

to their homes "which alone would answer the interests of the entire people of Pakistan". This dampened the three-day ardour of a good many.

Pakistan lost no time in seeking clarification from Moscow. A remarkable document, brought to light by Bangla Desh circles, provides an authoritative account of Pak thinking then. It is a résumé of the proceedings of a meeting of its envoys in Geneva on August 24 and 25 and was published by *Frontier* (October 30) as well as *The Indian Express*. According to the résumé, the Foreign Secretary, Mr. S. M. Khan, who presided, mentioned specifically "the August 17 letter of Kosygin promising Russia's continued desire to help Pakistan".

The Ambassador to Russia, Mr. Jamshed Marker, believed that "the Treaty was mainly aimed at extending Russian influence in South-East Asia. He regarded the Treaty as more anti-Chinese than anti-Pakistan". Ambassador Kaiser (reporting on China) candidly said he was "not sure about the nature of Chinese help in case of a war between India and Pakistan".

Shortly, thereafter, Mr. Khan went to Moscow where, he claimed (September 10), his hosts showed "deep interest in the unity and integrity of Pakistan". That he was not altogether wrong became clear from a report by Mr. Dev Murarka, Moscow Correspondent of *Commerce* who knows the thinking of the Russian Foreign office. "Although the Russians told Sultan Khan in no uncertain terms what they thought of the situation in Bangla Desh, they were not averse to keeping options in Pakistan open".

This became very clear from the Russian stand at the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference on September 10. Mr. Dileep Padgaonkar reported (*The Times of India*, September 23) that the Russians "would have nothing to do with a text that alluded even remotely to a reprimand of the Yahya Khan regime". The Joint Communique issued in Moscow ten days later on the conclusion of the Afghan King's visit was also lukewarm in its reference to the question.

Now Mrs. Gandhi decided to bring matters to a head. Her visit to the West had already been arranged when she decided to visit Moscow as well. It is very clear from the reports that have appeared that she did a lot of plain speaking and asserted herself far more in her discussions with the Russians than she had ever done before. It was tough bargaining all round. "India today (September 28) informed the Soviet Union that the Bangla Desh crisis might escalate after the monsoon" the UNI reported.

Premier Kosygin, once again, said that "the friendly Soviet-Indian relations will not be further strengthened through the worsening of relations with other countries". While he emphasized the need for a political solution, his guest noted his repeated counsel to Pakistan. "We hope that these efforts will bear fruit." The two sides "agreed to maintain mutual contacts" as the joint statement put it.

What Mr. Kosygin said to Indian correspondents surprised many of them. "This basic problem must be solved by peaceful political means and not by military conflict".

The events were taking place in Pakistani territory, he said and remarked "What pretext can Pakistan use for a military conflict with India ?" India's sole concern was the return of the refugees. The rest was an "internal matter of Pakistan". Later, he sought to allay Indian disquiet by criticising the atrocities committed by Pakistan. According to Mr. David Bonavia of *The Times*, the talks did not result in a "full identity of views". There can be no question, however, that the Russians were put on the spot and while they maintained their earlier Taskhentian role, basically they agreed that the matter was far graver than they had allowed. A qualitative change was noticed in Soviet press reportage which became from then onwards consistently and sharply critical of Pakistan's misdeeds in Bangla Desh. In Delhi, President Podgorny said (October 1) much the same things as Mr. Kosygin had in Moscow, but the Soviet press and Soviet Organisations condemned Pakistan more readily and unequivocally than ever before.

Was it a change of style or of substance ? For, the Soviet-Algerian Communique (October 9) declared that both sides "declare their respect for the national unity and territorial integrity of Pakistan and India and appeal to these countries to find a peace settlement for the problems confronting them in conformity with the principles of non-interference, mutual respect, good neighbourly relations and the spirit of the Tashkent meeting".

This surprised many in India but not as much as did Foreign Minister Swaran Singh's statement at the AICC, on October 8, that if the efforts were made now, the military rulers of Pakistan might be able to achieve "a political solution within the framework of Pakistan by granting greater autonomy to the Eastern wing or otherwise".

But the besotted ruler of Pakistan was deaf to reason and blind to the realities. Verily, those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first turn mad. Early in October, Pakistan moved its Army to forward positions all along India's western international border. The massing of troops, to be fair, was a game both had played before. But in a charged situation like the present one it was a step fraught with grave consequence. We have it on the authority of *The Times* Correspondent, Mr. Peter Hazelhurst, that "in early October there was no sign of an Indian military presence near the border" while Pakistan "had already deployed troops along the western front". India had no option but to move her troops to the border, as well.

Mr. Hazelhurst adds (December 6) that India "began to lay down contingency plans in mid-October". By then, nine million refugees had crossed into India and there was not the slightest indication from President Yahya Khan that he would consider a political solution.

All doubts on this point were removed at the talks between him and President Podgorny when they met in Persepolis, celebrating the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire. The special Correspondent of *New Wave*, a journal close to the Prime Minister, reported (October 24) that the Soviet President "had suggested that Indian and Pakistani forces withdraw a few kilometres into their respective territories to avoid a head-on clash. Yahya Khan refused to acept the suggestion unless India gave a

prior pledge to refrain from extending support to Bangla Desh freedom fighters".

The Russians, on their part, insisted also on the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman and negotiations with him. The Soviet Premier said at Ottawa (October 30) that although both countries had said they would not attack first, "it does not really matter who does it first, merely that it should not happen at all". The Soviet-Canadian joint Communique counselled restraint on *both* sides.

The Russians did not look too kindly on Mrs. Gandhi's visit to the Western countries but Mrs. Gandhi stuck to her plans, all the same. A mere 36 hours before her departure, Mr. Nikolai Firyubin, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, descended on New Delhi to the embarrassment of his hosts. It "seems to be part of the diplomatic pressure mounted by the big powers to prevent a war in the sub-continent" wrote Mr. C. S. Pandit (*The Sunday Standard,* October 24). The visit could not but "embarrass the Prime Minister who only three weeks ago made her stand clear to the Soviet leaders in Moscow". *Thus, two months and a half after the Treaty, India and Soviet Union were by no means in agreement on Bangla Desh.* Indeed, Mr. Denzil Peiris of *The Times* (London) reported (October 25) that the "main objective" of Mr. Firyubin's visit was to persuade the Bangla Desh Government "to scale down its demand for independence".

Mr. Firyubin met all who mattered, from the Prime Minister downwards. He was in New Delhi from October 22 to 25. The joint statement that was issued on October 27 contained these significant words: "The consultations took place in keeping with the existing procedure of annual bilateral consultations *and also under the provisions of Article X of the Soviet-Indian Treaty of Peace.* The consultations were held in connection with the tense situation in the Indian sub-continent, a situation which endangers the cause of peace in the area. *The two sides reached full accord in the assessment of the existing situation*". Three days later the C-in-C of the Soviet Air Force, Air Marshal P. S. Kontakhov, arrived in New Delhi. Mr. Swaran Singh had already told the Parliamentary Consultative Committee for his Ministry, on October 28, that India could count on "total support" from the Soviet Union in the event of an emergency.

A spokesman of the Pakistan Foreign Office claimed (*The Statesman,* November 6) that Russia had "assured" it of "support for the unity and integrity of Pakistan". Assuming this was so, it was, apparently, conditional on Pakistan seeing reason. This, it consistently refused to do. By now it was common knowledge that the U.S. was interceding with Pakistan and that all that President Yahya agreed to was to hold talks with *a nominee of the Sheikh.* The Russians must have drawn their own lessons from this as also from much else. For, if Mrs. Gandhi's visit to the West was a pointer, so was another visit—Mr. Z. A. Bhutto's to Peking in the first week of November. If Mr. Firyubin's descent on New Delhi did not symbolize Soviet descent from the diplomatic fence, the visits to the West and to China must have made the perch altogether uncomfortable.

At the Cochin Congress of the CPI the delegates of the French and

the Italian Communist Parties characterised Bangla Desh's struggle as a national liberation movement. In Communist parlance this meant a lot.

When, on November 9, the leader of the Soviet Parliamentary Party delegation, Mr. V. Kudryavtsev described the situation as the "natural development of a national liberation movement which had been aggravated by the action of the Pakistan authorities", it became clear that Soviet support for Pakistan's unity was gone. The "political solution" of a national liberation movement can only be independence.

What had happened ? Mr. Girish Mathur, a journalist in the know, gave these reasons (New Wave, November 14): "Till as late as Firyubin's visit to New Delhi, doubts were entertained by some Soviet theoriticians about the character of the Bangla Desh struggle and even *Soviet officials wanted to ascertain the role of the 'progressive elements in the struggle and the direction of the struggle' etc.* These doubts which probably account for initial Soviet hesitations in regard to Bangla Desh, persisted even after the delegations of the French and Italian Communist Parties to the Cochin Congress of the CPI had described the Bangla Desh situation as a national liberation struggle. The increased tempo of the struggle in Bangla Desh, *the emergence of the five-party consultative committee as the leader of the struggle*, the fighting quality and *the leading role of the progressive sections of the Mukti Bahini guerillas*, the isolation of the American lobby among the freedom-fighters and the frustration of the effort of American agents to create disruption among the Bangla Desh leaders must have gone a long way to remove Soviet doubts and generate more active Soviet interest in the struggle." (Italics mine throughout.)

Soviet Foreign Minister Mr. Gromyko assured Ambassador Shelvankar that in case the issue was raised at the U.N., full Soviet support would be available to India.

When the war broke out Soviet diplomatic support was there for all to see. Only, one wonders how many noticed that while the Soviet draft resolution tabled in the Security Council on December 5 demanded a political settlement and called only on Pakistan "to cease all acts of violence by Pakistani forces in East Pakistan", the Soviet resolution introduced on December 6 "Calls upon *all* parties concerned forthwith, as a first step, for an immediate cease-fire and cessation of all hostilities" and on Pakistan "simultaneously to take effective action *towards* a political settlement in East Pakistan, giving immediate recognition to the will of the East Pakistani population as expressed in the elections of December 1970". These two terms were to "constitute a single whole".

This was ten days before Dacca fell. Mr. Nurul Amin was later to criticise President Yahya Khan for failing to accept the Soviet resolution.

The record, then, does not support the facile assumption that the Indo-Soviet Treaty ensured Bangla Desh's liberation. Well over two months after the Treaty Russia was non-committal. The change came later.

The fact of the later change is as undeniable as it is puzzling. "A Puzzling Policy Switch" was the title of an article on the subject by Mr. Alain Jacob in "Le Monde". According to Mr. Girilal Jain, Moscow "apparently continued to hope till at least as late as the end of October

that General Yahya Khan and other members of the military junta would listen to friendly advice, release Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and open negotiations with him". Mrs. Gandhi's refusal to wait indefinitely in the face of Pakistan's obduracy settled the issue.

Given India's consistent diplomatic support to the Soviet Union in recent years, the military hardware and Soviet diplomatic support could have been obtained without the Treaty. There was no Treaty in 1965 when we received the advantages of both. On the other hand, ample evidence exists that the Treaty by itself did not ensure support in 1971. The support had to be bargained for *after* and *despite* the Treaty. Negotiated over two years, it was signed at a given moment ostensibly for a purpose it did not fulfil. Now, the other considerations will come into play. In the main Bangla Desh was liberated, thanks to the spirit and grit of its people and India's resolute determination to use force in their support when diplomacy failed to secure any results.

It is more useful now to reflect on the reasons for the puzzling policy switch than attribute to Soviet diplomacy a consistency it did not have.

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A MAN IS A SEASON

A man is a season,
You are eternity.
To teach me this you let me toss my youth like coins
Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,
You let me sing in empty shrines, you let your wife
Seek ecstasy in others' arms. But I saw each
Shadow cast your blurred image in my glass, somehow
The words and gestures seemed familiar. Yes,
I sang solo, my songs were lonely, but they did
Echo beyond the world's unlighted edge, there was
Then no sleep left undisturbed, the ancient hungers
Were all awake. Perhaps I lost my way, perhaps
I went astray. How would a blind wife trace her lost
Husband, how would a deaf wife hear her husband call?

HERONS

On sedatives
I am more lovable
Says my husband
My speech becomes a mistladen terrain
The words emerge tinctured with sleep
They rise from the still coves of dreams
In unhurried flight like herons . . .
And my ragdoll-limbs adjust better
To his versatile lust . . . he would if he could
Sing lullabies to his wife's sleeping soul
Sweet lullabies to thicken its swoon
On sedatives
I grow more lovable
Says my husband.

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MUSLIM WOMEN ON THE MOVE

A. B. SHAH

THE recent Conference of Muslim women called by the Indian Secular Society and the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal at Poona on December 27-28, 1971 was the first of its kind in the history of India. Not only after India became free but even earlier there had been no such gathering of Muslim women. It is true that they used to meet occasionally under the leadership of the Muslim League before partition. Though most of the leaders of the League, and in particular Mr. Jinnah himself, were free from the taboos of traditional Islam, they never encouraged Muslim women to demand any reform in their status *vis-a-vis* men. The meetings of Muslim women were held primarily for political purposes; they hardly ever touched upon the problems of reform within the Muslim community, especially in relation to the rights of women and children.

The Conference at Poona was therefore unique in the history of the Muslim society and marks a turning point in its evolution. It was inaugurated by Professor A. A. A. Fyzee, the eminent authority on Muslim law. His work, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law* is internationally recognised as a standard work on the subject and is used as a text-book in nearly 20 countries, including Egypt, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Professor Fyzee's inaugural address was one of the most inspired and inspiring ones I have heard from any platform. He traced the various stages of legal systems as they have evolved in response to changing social and cultural contexts and asserted that it was meaningless to talk of the *Shariat* in India. One can do so, he explained, only in a Muslim country, governed by a Caliph and administered by Muslim judges according to the injunctions of the Quran. None of these conditions obtained in India, not even under British rule. The law which governed the life of the Muslims under British rule in India had little to do with the *Shariat*, except in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. All other aspects of life were governed by secular laws laid down by the British regardless of what the *Shariat* said.

Pointing out the inequities of the present Muslim Personal Law as practised under the Shariat Act of 1937, Professor Fyzee said: "It has brought untold miseries to Muslim women and should be discarded forthwith in favour of a uniform civil code". He blamed the political and religious leaders of the Muslim community for having sought to keep their womenfolk 'in perpetual slavery' by raising the 'bogey of interference in their religion whenever anyone demanded reform of the Muslm Personal Law'.

In her presidential address Mrs. Sharifa Tyabji, a social worker from Srirampur in Ahmednagar district, gave a call to Muslim women in the country to rise against the 'tyrannical and unilateral' provisions of the

Muslim Personal Law governing marriage, divorce and inheritance. She paid a tribute to the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and asserted that woman could also become as successful a statesman as man. 'The victory in the 14-day war is the victory of the women of Bangla Desh as much as their menfolk in their struggle for justice and equality. I congratulate them,' she added.

The Conference was attended by 169 Muslim women, most of them from Maharashtra but a few from Surat, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Calcutta also. Many of them went to Poona in spite of abuse and threats of persecution from local Muslims who claimed to be the custodians of the *Shariat* in India. The Muslim League in Poona tried to disturb the proceedings on the first day but their agents were immediately isolated and made to leave the hall. Women delegates from Amravati and Akola had to go to the railway station under police escort. And the *Jamaat-e-Islami* even sent a 'delegate' from Lucknow with instructions to oppose the resolution on uniform civil code. As it turned out, after listening to the speeches by Professor Fyzee and Mrs. Tyabji, and the arguments of those who spoke on the resolution, she was converted to the conference point of view and voted for the resolution!

The Conference adopted six resolutions, all unanimously after vigorous debate. The resolution on the need for a uniform civil code was moved by Begum Fakhar Syed, well-known social worker of Delhi and closely related to the founder of the Jamiyat-ul-Ulama-e-Hind. That on family planning was moved by Mrs. Banubi Pathan, Municipal Councillor from Ichalkaranji. The first resolution demanded the enactment of a uniform civil code for the entire territory of India as directed by Article 44 of the Constitution and, pending such enactment, 'called upon the Union and State Governments to take the necessary executive or legislative action for the immediate removal of the glaring inequities of the present personal law for Muslims'.

What next? The Conference has demonstrated the courage of Muslim women and the crying need for the modernisation of Muslim attitudes and institutions. But it would be wrong if the sponsors were to rest on their oars. The enthusiasm generated by the Conference and the willingness for organised action shown by the Muslim women who attended the Conference could all too easily fade away in the absence of steady follow-up work. The Indian Secular Society and the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal have therefore decided to hold similar regional conferences at Delhi, Calcutta and Hyderabad or Madras in the near future, to culminate in an all-India conference of Muslim women by the end of 1972. They hope to create thereby an all-India platform from which the thirty million Muslim women of India can effectively fight for equality, social justice and human dignity, which the Constitution of India proclaims as the birthright of every Indian citizen.

Muslim women are aware that they are not going to get much support from their menfolk, at least not in the initial stage. If anything, they will have to face strong opposition from the self-appointed guardians of Islam and its culture in India. Indeed, the delegates from Amravati are

already being persecuted on their return from the Conference. They are subjected to the usual harassment by sympathisers of the Muslim League and the Jamaat-e-Islami in Amravati. Mr. Sheikh Vazir Patel, a leading worker of the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal who escorted them to Poona and back, has been threatened with death and has therefore to move under police protection. The persons guilty of this scandalous behaviour are not unknown to the police and can easily be rounded up and 'persuaded' to realize that India is still a secular state in which every citizen—even a Muslim woman—has the right to free expression. Unfortunately, perhaps because the elections are in the offing, nothing seems to have been done so far by way of putting a stop to their patently illegal behaviour. Unless this is done, in sheer desperation the persecuted persons may have to seek protection from their non-Muslim sympathisers and this may lead to Hindu-Muslim tension, if not worse, just on the eve of the elections.

Regardless of what Government and the police at Amravati do or fail to do, Muslim women now know that they are not alone. Their non-Muslim sisters and a number of devoted public workers, both Muslim and Hindu, have welcomed this new awakening and are willing to offer whatever co-operation their Muslim sisters need. Thereby alone can they contribute to the creation of a truly liberal and secular society in India.

Government too has a responsibility in this regard. So far, whenever a demand was made for the reform of Muslim Personal Law it used to say that it did not consider it wise to move in the matter until Muslims themselves demanded a change. This is, of course, plain nonsense. Nowhere does the Constitution of India say that inequitous social practices should be allowed to continue so long as their victims do not rise in revolt. The British Government in India did not subscribe to this pernicious and anti-humanist principle. *Sati*, for example, would never have been banned if Lord William Bentinck had decided to wait for the demand to come from Hindu men or even from those who suffered from this barbarous custom. Besides, Article 44 of the Constitution clearly directs the State to 'secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India'.

It is often argued by the apologists of the present Muslim Personal Law that a uniform civil code enacted without the prior constant of a majority of the Muslim community in India would violate the guarantee of religious freedom given by Article 25 of the Constitution. This is a fallacious argument. The article in question only guarantees 'the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion'. It does not contemplate freedom to treat fellow-citizens as chattel. On the contrary, it clearly lays down that nothing in it shall prevent the state 'from making any law providing for social welfare and reform'. Those who take cover behind the Constitution in opposing the enactment of a uniform civil code are therefore either ignorant of the provisions of the Constitution or guilty of deliberate falsehood. Besides, how is one to decide whether a majority of the Muslims of India desire change? By a referendum? And was such a practice followed for ascertaining the desirability of enacting the Hindu Code or of abolishing untouchability and declaring it a crime?

In any case, it would be patently unjust to expect that those who exploit their womenfolk and treat them as virtual slaves would voluntarily agree to abdicate their privilege.

So far as Muslim women are concerned, they have demanded in ringing tones the enactment of a uniform civil code. It is now for the Government and the secular political parties to respond to this demand by treating the issue as cutting across party lines and involving the fundamental human values of which we as a nation are justly proud.

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THE TAKEOVER

Helpless, she watched one or the other
talk to the guests:
the cocktail butterfly growing in brilliance
like a comet in the sky, and
the moth vibrating with the quiet-drawing
power of the moon.
She scurried softly by the wall,
hid in dark corners,
if such could be found,
till it was time to go home.

. . . . . .

Did she want to go back home?
More and more the effort to assert herself
left her drained, as any jellyfish,
stranded at the highwater mark,
watches the wavery
withdrawal-lines of the receding tide.
Their powers waxed as hers waned . . .
till one day.

. . . . . .

one day, her sister and nephew
found her dead in bed.
Why, he cried, Aunt looks so small!
As small as . . . instinctively, his mother
choked the words back into his mouth with her hand,
feeling a cold cold wind finger her skin.

. . . . . .

The fair wig and the dark wig,
that stood in the wings of the dressingtable,
preen themselves in the centre mirror.

. . . . . .

But the young voice pushed into the well
wails, and will not drown—
as small as a spider crumpled in death.

MOTHER GODDESS

Taking earth wet with spit,
I fashion
a ball I place in this terracotta
mute mouth.
The Mother Goddess speaks:
her words
fly from the bow of nineteen centuries,

filling my ears
with the roar of mountain waters,
Ganga caught in Shiva's hair,
From her clogged nostrils I breathe
the nomad dust of the Yue-chi tribe,
the Kushanas,
whose reddened eyes,
sought a limit to horizons, and
hungered hearts,
then as now,
the permanence of green pastures.

Rosemary Pinto

PROBLEM POET

When Young Hopeful says,
"Did you read my poems, ma'am?
What did you think of them?"
I panic.
Threeful hearts a-throbbing, page one.
Doleful damsels denying, page two.
I offer tea and cigarettes :
Mercy killing is also murder.
He will be gentlemanly, of course,
perfectly so.
"I quite agree ma'am," he will say,
and rush away
to weep bitter tears
for a day.
And I won't be able to read
for an hour.

Eunice de Souza

A CASE FOR AN INDO-PAK-BANGLA DESH CONFEDERATION

HUSSAIN SHAHEEN

IN the turbulent early forties, Mr. Jinnah, as the President of the All India Muslim League, which claimed to be "the sole representative political organisation of hundred million Indian Muslims," had based his claim of Pakistan on his two-nation theory as follows :

"We maintain and hold that Hindus and Muslims are two major nations by every test or definition of a nation. We are a nation of hundred million. Wnat is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilisation, art and architecture, language and literature, customs and calendar, and names and nomenclature. . . ."

Later, when asked at a press conference, what he proposed to do with the millions of Muslims and Hindus, who would still be left behind in each other's 'home land' after the proposed partition of India into Pakistan and Hindustan, Mr. Jinnah had indicated three alternatives :

(a) Trans-migration or total exchange of Hindu and Muslim populations from Pakistan and Hindustan ;
(b) Adoption of citizenship by Hindus and Muslims of respective new states of Pakistan and Hindustan ; and
(c) As for those Hindus and Muslims who would not opt for either of the aforesaid two alternatives, Mr. Jinnah gave them a third choice too, viz., choosing to stay as aliens or foreigners in the new states with the permission and protection of the concerned governments.

By now, it is well-known that there was more of rhetoric than realism, good sense or logic, either in the "two nation theory", or the other political corollaries, as enunciated by Mr. Jinnah, while espousing the cause of his political dreamland.

It is needless to recall or emphasise here, how the history of the Indo-Pak sub-continent of the last quarter of a century which witnessed three fratricidal Indo-Pak wars, and numerous Hindu-Muslim communal riots, leading to so much human misery and suffering to all, proved almost all the theoretical assumptions for Pakistan to be utterly wrong, impracticable, and harmful.

But to be fair to Mr. Jinnah, it must be acknowledged that he had recognised in his lifetime itself the absurdity and impractability of his political theories of Pakistan. It appears that it was mainly to wrest more concessions and advantages from his political opponents that Mr. Jinnah had put forward and advocated vehemently, such utopian political theories, demanding a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims. This is obvious from the fact that Mr. Jinnah was the first amongst the political leaders

of undivided India to accept a federal set-up for a United India, as envisaged by the British Cabinet Mission in 1946, a year before the federal partition of the sub-continent.

Apart from this, it is also noteworthy that after Pakistan came into being, Mr. Jinnah had begun to show his keen awareness of the fallacy and impractability of his two-nation theory, when as the Governor-General of the new state of Pakistan he thought it necessary to exhort his countrymen about the virtues of common citizenship for the followers of all religions. Mr. Jinnah reminded his people that religion was one's personal affair, and that Hindus and Muslims after freedom, were common citizens enjoying equal rights, and that they ceased to be Hindus and Muslims, *not religiously, but in the political sense.*

Though Pakistan was supposed to be the largest "Islamic State" in the world, and was brought into being with an ostensible and avowed purpose of serving as a "homeland" for the hundred million Muslims of undivided India, the new state failed in several respects to live up to any of its lofty ideals. Moreover, as recorded by Maulana Azad in his book *India Wins Freedom* Pakistan proved *"harmful not only for India as a whole, but for Muslims in particular"*. The theory of "hostages" advocated by some fanatics, as a solution to safeguard the life and property of the Hindus and Muslims of Pakistan and India after the partition, had most dangerous and disastrous implications and consequences for minorities in both countries and the Muslims of India in particular.

As for the Muslims in the two wings of Pakistan, constituting the new "Islamic State", there was of course nothing common between them, except the religion of Islam. Geography and language appeared as two great stumbling blocks against nation integration of the two wings, which were separated by over a thousand miles of Indian territory.

After the death of Mr. Jinnah in 1948, and the politically motivated assassination of his able lieutenant Mr. Liaqat Ali Khan a couple of years later, power in Pakistan passed into unscrupulous hands, who under successive ruthless regimes, exploited the religious susceptibilities of the masses. Apart from naming the new capital of Pakistan "Islamabad", these power hungry rulers, did little else that would bring any credit either to themselves or to the lofty principles of Islam. The unprecedented tragedy that has overtaken Pakistan, following her military debacle in the 14-day India-Pakistan war and the emergence of an independent Bangla Desh, was in fact a culmination of a series of events, and was a direct result of unprincipled opportunism, moral degradation, erosion of national character and continuous bungling on the part of the rulers of Pakistan for almost two decades.

Mr. Z. A. Bhutto the present President of Pakistan, in a booklet aptly titled *The Great Tragedy*, which was published before he assumed power recently, had in a powerful indictment written : "In the name of our great religion of Islam, the most ruthless and inhuman form of exploitation was practised over the common man. No Muslim country, no Muslim people

have done so much disservice to Islam as a handful of discredited leaders in Pakistan by misusing the great name of Islam to allow an iniquitous economic system to flourish in Pakistan. The cold-blooded exploitation of the people is the major cause of the troubles we face today. The whole country has suffered, but East Pakistan had borne the main brunt. . ."

It is for consideration, how for Mr. Bhutto himself, who had shared the political power and glory as Foreign Minister under Marshal Ayub Khan for a number of years before 1966, could claim exclusion from his own indictment.

However, it is now for men of peace and goodwill in both India and Pakistan, to pause and explore the possibilities of healing the bleeding wounds ; and undoing and repairing the immense harm and damage done to the social fabrics and economies of both countries, as a result of mutual hatred, and frequent internecine wars on the sub-continent.

While Bangla Desh has became a reality, and will take its rightful place, sooner rather than later, in the comity of world nations, it is also a hard fact that troubles for both India and Pakistan are far from ended. While West Pakistan continues to feel sore and bitter over her military defeat and loss of what was once "East Pakistan" and to entertain feelings of revenge against India, India can certainly not afford to lessen the vigilance on her borders just to befriend a hostile Pakistan. Over the part 24 years, relations of India and Pakistan have also been bedevilled over the problem of Kashmir.

The world super-powers instead of being impartial and neutral, have their own political games to play in the sub-continent, and exploiting the chronic Indo-Pak differences for their own selfish ends, make the Indo-Pak sub-continent and South Asian region a cock-pit of their international intrigues. India and Pakistan by perpetually confronting each other, also divert their limited resources to purposes other than constructive. Poverty, ignorance and disease continue to be the most urgent common problems in both countries, deserving top priority.

It would therefore appear imperative that the peoples of India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh, evolve by mutual consent and free will, a confederation of the sovereign and independent states, linking one another bysocial, economic and cultural ties. Such a confederation, while ensuring full and complete political freedom for each state, can usher in an era of peace, progress and prosperity for all, and eliminate the irritants, which poison *ad infinitum* their mutual relations. This confederation can later welcome into its fold other member-states too such as Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan ; and even Burma and Ceylon to form a great commonwealth or international community which would set an example in peaceful international co-operation and brotherhood to the world at large. Leaders of Pakistan like Mr. Bhutto, who indulged in the past in wild talk of waging "a 1,000-year war" against India, might well remember that the future of Pakistan can lie only in peaceful co-existence and co-operation with Pakistan's neighbours, particularly India. Any continuation of "hate-India"

campaign or bickering over Kashmir and Bangla Desh by Pakistan will prove suicidal to Pakistan.

While an Indo-Pak-Bangla Desh confederation as envisaged will be of immense value to India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh as weaker and smaller states are likely to benefit even more than India. Moreover, that such a confederation would have a most healthy and salutary effect in stabilising the communal situation on the entire sub-continent, which would make it a boon for the Hindu-Muslim minorities in all the concerned states. Considering these advantages, an Indo-Pak-Bangla Desh confederation, as envisaged, seems not only desirable, but also necessary for ensuring peace, progress and stability on the entire sub-continent.

Continued from page 32)

The Bhikshu stood, front door open, draft in small of back, hypnotised. Gradually he began to cry and laugh and shiver and chatter all at once. 'Damn, damn, damn,' he said 'Damn all our male posturings. Damn all the churails and hobgoblins, real and imagined, that we project on the world. And God damn the boys that we are for we must come home at last. Damn all our magic and shit and bile. And damn the conquistador we send forth on his triumphant horse to look for the treasure of our ambition. The gold we seek has always been hidden, under our own doorstep. The lost child has never left the lap of our Lady Radharani'.

His gibbering finally awoke the massive figure in the chair. The Lady Abbess smiled showing herself for the beautiful woman she had always been. 'Hullo K', she said. 'Did you go out for a walk ?'

The Bhikshu said, 'Where was Maia ?'

'Under the bed,' yawned the Lady 'She was hiding from the magic witch. I told her there are no witches here.' She put her hand on the child's head.

The Bhikshu K was very still watching his halfasleep wife. In the dying glow of the fire the room was cold and quiet. Through the empty space of his head, all that could be heard was a great silence. Fire and flash and candlelight caught him off guard ; frost and the moon's bright fortnight. And a rumble of golden bees up the spine. And then, as always spontaneously, came a flash of unstruck sound ; the roar of Announcing Thunder ; a signator of the ascending Prince of Heaven. All that he thought he was fell dead and vacant and withered, like scurry of winter leaves. All husk, waiting for a wind at midnight.

'Praise be to God in the Highest' the Bhikshu thought, bad poet to the end ; before he let go into the enormous bliss invading the precincts of his body 'Praised be our Common All-Father ; that after wrestling with Him on rarefied imaginary battlefields, He allows us to stumble on Himself in our own back garden. And Glory to the Saints in Heaven, for the real visitations they permit us. Not in the diamond mines of the occult, but in waiting room and hall and shabby hill-station boarding house.'

The Bhikshu stood, hardly daring to raise his eyes; only half aware of a great, compulsive falling of tears. A massive wave of security swept across him from the almost invisible figure in the room. He looked as a man looks, who after many years of struggle, stands at last, face to face with Deity, unable to believe who that Deity is. Then without a sound and with no fuss at all, as though it were the only thing in the world left to do, he knelt, and put his head at his Lady's feet.

THIS BUSINESS

It doesn't make any sense
to me, either.
This business of poetry.

Who the hell cares
if an entire lifetime is burnt
up in a page?

They died young. If Keats
had never lived
or, an elephant crushed Bharati

the history of the race
would be exactly the same.
I am often dissatisfied

with it—the only thing
I can do reasonably well.
Yet I write

and reach after the dead
by breaking
this bread of poetry.

R. Parthasarathy

A Sermon for that child whom the

ANGELS IN HEAVEN ARE POWERLESS TO FIND

or

THE NIGHT THAT MAIA WAS LOST

THE BHIKSHU K and
THE LADY ABBESS SNEHLATA DAMAYANTI

'HOW much more pleasant this is, than sitting up night after night in meditation trying to shove the thing up your spine' said the Bhikshu, his face half submerged in a gigantic tankard of Pimm's No. 1. He was sitting in a floppy wicker armchair under a very large Beech which stood dowager like, gnarled but ramrod, in the grounds of the West View Hotel at Ranikhet. Behind him in the low blaze of a January noon, half a dozen Himalayan giants: Panchachuli, Neelakanth, Trisul, Nanda Devi, looked like silent brazen earth-gods; which indeed, if you understood the matter rightly, they were.

'It is good' the Bhikshu continued his monologue, 'to work like a fiend and develop Inner Will. It is also necesary to have enough perspective to know when to take a holiday. Just sit and *be*. Like this.' And he waved his arm at the silent landscape around him.

The landscape remained silent. In the chair opposite, the Lady Abbess continued her book on *The Chinese Maze Murders* with unflagging concentration. Judge Dee was her particular favourite and nothing much short of earthquake or Act of God could shake her.

The Bhikshu looked unhappy and began to fidget. But he was the kind of loser who never knows when to stop. 'It is also good' he added 'to read detective novels. Sometimes.'

'You betcha' said his wife shortly 'In silence if possible. They're better than all that sloppy Tibetan magic stuff you read.'

The Bhikshu floundered; game to the end: 'Kabbalah my dear, Kabbalah. The Tibetan period ended three years ago'. He articulated this in his best Public School undertone, a wry smile on his lips. He knew damn well after eight years of marriage, that irony, understatement and other civilized weapons were powerless against the heavy guns amassed on the other side. But he had never been able to help himself.

'Jewish bullshit, useful for frightening halfwits' the Lady Abbess went pleasantly cat-eyed in the afternoon sunlight. 'Tell me your Reverence, what use do you find for the stuff? Other than maintaining the circular pattern of your self-esteem, I mean. Do you think it makes you an interesting person?'

The Bhikshu K stared dully into the distance. He looked as the French peasant looked, who first sighted a column of advancing panzers

on the horizon. 'It gives me a weapon with which to explore my own insides' he said parrot-like 'a grid, a set of symbols, a matrix to hold the subconscious energies,' and he collapsed hopelessly into jargon. 'What do *you* find in your wretched detective novels ?' he questioned bitterly.

As in all her minor skirmishes, the Lady abandoned no point of advantage until she had bludgeoned the opposition into unconditional stupor. Leaning forward as one who condescends to a single jewelled aphorism every other solstice, she said 'There is more *real* psychology in Father Brown than there is in all of Jung. And more real mystery in *The Hounds of the Baskervilles* than in all the mystifications of Aleister Crowley.'

The Bhikshu sank like a stone into a backwater of self-pity. Every humiliation that his slow moving shins had ever suffered on a hockey field, every derisive giggle aimed at his first pair of long pants at a school social, bubbled and gibbered as the twelve year old in him assumed control. Suddenly the black, fir-laden hills looked as flat as the sands at Chowpatty.

He sat and sulked.

* * * *

The Bhikshu was still sulking six hours later as he sat by a roaring spitting winter blaze, tankard now exchanged for a glass of steaming, sweet, rum toddy. He was exploring the Brothers Grimm somewhat glumly with his four year old daughter and had just finished the story of Rumpelstiltskin.

'Why couldn't the dwarf keep her in prison because she knew his name ?' asked the child bright-eyed from his lap.

'Because puppy' said K 'there is real power in the naming of names. All the best books say so. Pronounce a person's *real* name and you have power over that person.'

'Magic Power?' asked Maia, who was rapidly changing from baby to little girl.

The Bhikshu chuckled 'Yes, puppy, *magic* power.'

'Is magic real dada ?' the child insisted.

The Bhikshu sighed heavily 'That's right, go ahead and ask me. Everyone asks me. They think I know. What do you mean by *real* ? I've seen some very queer things. I've seen focussed ill-will make people go sick. That's black magic isn't it ? I've had occasion to close myself against it. What's that if it isn't a pentagram ? I've seen conscious love change people across a thousand miles. That's a *real* miracle what ?'

'Was the dwarf a witch, dada ?'

'Something of one.'

'Are witches *real*, dada ?'

The Bhikshu viewed his offspring with a liverish eye. 'You're an intelligent little bugger aren't you ?' And he continued explosively 'How the hell should I know. Are witches real ? Are vampires real ? Are ghosts real ? I've never stood in a graveyard at midnight intoning the twenty variations of Adonai and Elohim and Sabaoth. It would be very silly to do so. I'm a grown man.' And then kissing his daughter he added 'I'm no witch-baiter puppy, and no ghost hunter neither. I've never gone

out looking for one. And Thakur has never sent one to cross my path. I've never had a real visitation. So I don't really know.'

But the child was not so easily put off. 'Can a witch come into this house at night ?'

K looked uneasy. 'I suppose so' he mumbled.

'Would you fight the witch, Dada ?'

The Bhikshu permitted himself a dry, self-conscious grin 'Yes, yes, I should hope so. I've been in training for five years for just such an eventuality. I've even fantasised myself as world middleweight champion in that department. I wonder what happens though to little boys playing at magical games, when they come face to face with the real Medusa.'

'Is a *Midusa* real Dada ?'

'There you go again, you little pink cheeked slut' the Bhikshu giggled happily : 'Yes it would appear so. The one time Crowley stopped play-acting and got real results, he nearly went out of his mind. And when Levi finally, successfully summoned the shade of Apollonius, he remained shaken for days afterwards. He was intelligent enough though to have reservations about the *objective* reality of the spectre. Never mind about real. They seem real enough where you bring off a proper confrontation. And never mind about *objective*. There are enough real monsters in the deeps of our own soul, to have to worry about looking for them outside.'

'If a Midusa tried to eat me Dada, would you smash it ?' The child maintained an absurd, competitive, wide-awake interest in the subject.

But the Bhikshu was rum-laden and half asleep in the heat of the fire. 'You're an odd child' he muttered 'You must have been conceived with the Moon and Saturn in trine.' And as he nodded he thought of a faraway August Sunday afternoon composed of cognac and monsoon earth and Eros, when after months of dattura seed and dexedrine neurosis, sortilege and pentagrams and sleepless excited narcissistic nights, he had laid his head in his wife's lap in a sort of hopeless surrender, and the living heart of all things had opened like a summer flower. 'That's bad poetry' thought the Bhikshu wryly standing away from his own imagist stream. 'Nevertheless, the real thing is the real thing, and when one flower in the Heart opens, that's no metaphor but a physical explosion in the middle of the chest. The Centre is the Centre, even in people whose training and temperament compel them to turn the experience into second rate verse. And whether magic is real or no, it is a sheer fact that the power of love can break any pentagram even one of the hardest egoistic, magical iron. Yes, and the law of correspondences being what it is, finally produce a child who will prattle about witches at the age of four.'

The Bhikshu K dozed and dawdled as though in some warm bath of asses' milk. And he scarcely noticed that Maia was not in his lap any longer. He moved sleepily half out of his chair. 'Snehlata, has Maia gone to bed ? Is she properly covered ?'

Opposite him, his Lady rumbled and snorted 'Bafroom' she replied 'I fink she's gone to the bawf'.

Bear-footed and lumbering in the dark, the Bhikshu slopped into bedrooms and bath and back again to the fireside. 'She's not in the house' he

said and as though the statement were some secret encoded signal to a buried layer of his brain, snapped instantly alert and reached for his flashlight. Blowing a kiss at the fireplace, he opened the front door quietly and stepped out into a freezing eight o'clock January night.

'Maia' he said quietly 'Maia, puppy ?'

Overhead Orion blazing, his belt aglitter in the clear hill air. Rigel blazing, Aldeberan, Sirius with hidden fires, on the horizon Canopus flaunting diamonds. The silence was overwhelming. K felt small and crushed. Quickly and without fuss, titles crumbled, pretentions went berserk and died. The Bhikshu vanished in a flash of real magic and remained a small anxious father flashing his torch, sweater turning transparent against massive banks of arctic air, rum evaporating from lymph node and gland. Pulse quickened and went dull and steady. Bloodstream went sane and thin. Against the huge insecurity of the night, K, all centre gone, all Deity reduced to vanishing distance, shone his little Eveready torch. Real magic demands the whole man, paunch, weak knees and all. 'Maia' feebly 'Maia' again. Plead, you bastard.

Then incredibly out of fog and the low dark came a clear 'Dada'. And again. From the thorns and thickets of a distant shrubbery.

'Dada'.

"Maia come here. Come here love'.

Silence. Two steps forward. Five steps. 'Maia'.

Ten steps into the unknown black curtain of darkness.

And again, clear, honest, unmistakeable 'Dada'.

'Come here you, come *here*,' said K.

Flounder, step, crunch, into the polar night. Where the hell *was* that bloody child. If it were possible to hate a four year old, K's hackles expanded now with a resentful black bile.

'Maia' frightened now 'Stop playing games. Come *here* baba.'

By what throw of the dice, what terrible hold of seed is a father driven ? Two minutes, five, ten. Past the cantonment. Fifteen minutes, God knows, fifty ? Past the club. Past the military hospital, landmarks fading ; power station and parade ground insane and blurred against the present wilderness. Hedges of mad emotion telescoped, accelerating.

Uncanny in the near vast distance 'Dada'.

K stopped, the Bhikshu reappeared, vanished again. What remained of him remembered, looked in and froze. 'You've been taken in lad', said the old Tartar in his blood, a final bald Slavic voice which he had learnt to trust. 'Here is your Medusa. Good luck. And help yourself.'

Slowly, the magician hammered himself out. Following in some blind way, his path of training, the Bhikshu came erect, withdrew, and quickly and cold-bloodedly threw a solid, protective, sphere of fire round Maia wherever she might be. 'Maia' he said again.

A dead silence in the air. And then like a quickening erotic pulse came a flash of bells, the stamp of a foot and bells again. Anklets exploding like a wave of laughter.

Every threshold in the Celtic twilight of the Bhikshu's mind, erupted. Each corner of brain cell, every nerve in hamstring and small of back tore

loose, as a black critical mass of nervous sweat went down the rigid dorsal muscles. Each vampire he had known or not known, each spectre laid or unlaid, every goblin and ghost shade and hag and werewolf, sighted in book or by candle, by cradle or precognition, circled his living hide. For he knew then in a slither of brimstone that the unseen feet on which those anklets jingled were long dead in childbirth and twisted backwards. And he knew also that though the shadowy woman out there queried and contested his own flesh and blood child from some terrible womb-hunger ; it was not Maia's safety for which he fought, but for his own.

Jingle went the anklets like a close noose at his throat. Jingle Jing, Jang, Flang. The animal in him neighed and reared, howled and showed a mad froth of saliva, as animals do in the presence of the real psychic.

From somewhere between solar plexus and frantic heartbeat, the Old Gentleman put a hand on the scruff of the Bhikshu's neck and held him till he went quiet. 'Hey boy', he said in his queer Slavic way, 'Why you frightened ? Worst she can do is kill you. What you got to lose ? You been trying to lose that for a long time !'

And then, like the true magician he might one day be, the Bhikshu laughed. He threw no protective circle around himself. 'Is it my fool hide you want ?' he said. 'Most welcome, but ask my wife first. And get permission from the authorities and from the head of my family. Ask Uncle George. And my Great Aunt Moti.' And in some incredible way he smiled joyfully. For even on a wet, dark, cold night, fucked and far from home, to remember the Guru is to be happy.

If you have connections with the real authorities, use them. But be sure to name the real names. For not by pentagrams of egoistic magic are our ghosts laid. Sometimes not even by the exorcism of love. But like any common criminal, they come to heel when you mention the police.

Flash of brimstone and jingle of anklet slid quietly into a buried palaeolithic of dexedrine and benighted magic. The night was cold yet almost now friendly. But the Bhikshu's guts were still bloody at the ends. He sat in the mud of a Ranikhet winter, utterly tired, and like any boy adventurer and ghost hunter unable to prove anything beyond a considerable expenditure of personal energy.

Back he went, city slicker caught in a hill winter, quivering and cold and miserable and without a cigarette to his compulsive name. Three mechanical miles of walking brought him back to the hotel, and all he could remember was his small pyjama clad daughter. He had quite forgotten every vow of detachment he had ever made. 'Please Thakur,' he said like every other father in the world, 'Give that child back to me, and I will do whatever you say for the rest of my life. I will kiss your feet.' And mumbling and moaning like an unlaid ghost, he walked back into his rooms at the hotel.

The front room was quiet as death. Crackle of logs had died down to a cinder of glowing coals. In the central chair sat the Lady Abbess. On her lap, small and fast asleep, thumb in mouth, was the little girl.

(*Continued on page* 26